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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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APR 19 1934
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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Thursday, May 17, 1934.

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Subject: "Window Gardens." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Gardens are on my mind this morning. The weather is partly responsible. And one of my listeners is also responsible. This lady called me on the phone yesterday and said, "Why don't you give us a chat on window gardens? You know there are a lot of people in this world -- like me, for example -- who live in apartments, who haven't any yard for a garden, but who love flowers just the same. We'd appreciate advice on growing some cheerful blooms in our windows."

I don't know who first invented the idea of gardens in boxes. Maybe the idea came from the hanging gardens way back in Babylonia. Anyway, it certainly was a happy thought, especially for city people and apartment dwellers. Flower boxes provide decoration not only for windows but also for a bare edge of a porch or garage, or even for the top of a wall. A clever young wife I know had a window box outside her kitchen last year that carried out the color scheme inside. Her kitchen was done in pale green and soft yellow. The nasturtiums bobbing outside her window repeated those very shades.

Well, now to get down to some practical advice about window boxes. First about the boxes themselves. Of course, you want them durable above everything else. The specialists tell me that seasoned cypress is the very best wood for the purpose, because it is resistant to decay and is much more sturdy than woods of a softer grain. Cypress will stand up under weight and wear and wetness.

Be sure the sides of your box are fastened together with screws instead of nails. Screws don't pull out so easily. Then, be sure the corners are reinforced with angle irons. Bore some small holes in the bottom for drainage. If you build your boxes well, they'll last for years. You can also buy metal boxes that are fairly inexpensive and lighter in weight than the wooden ones. But be sure to put holes in the bottom of metal boxes; otherwise, the soil will become sour and waterlogged.

Now about the soil to fill your boxes. Since the plants have only this small boxful for their nourishment, you have to be careful to get the right mixture. A good combination is two parts of garden loam with one part of well-rotted compost and one part of sand. The sand helps prevent the soil from packing down and caking. Now, before you put in this soil mixture, spread a layer of some coarse material on the bottom of the box to insure plenty of drainage. Small stones or broken flower pots will do. Then put on a layer of coarse soil to keep the finer soil from clogging the spaces between the broken crocks. Finally, fill the box with the fine sifted soil mixture.

Now about the plants that grow best in boxes. Geraniums have always been great favorites because they are hardy and come in such bright, cheerful colors. Other good choices, especially for this climate, are heliotrope, petunias,

marguerites and sweet alyssum. The plant called hills-of-snow makes a lovely, white, low, compact effect. In partly shaded boxes you can grow begonias nicely. Where you have trouble making other flowers grow, try pinks or verbenas, mignonette or dwarf nasturtium. Balcony petunias are splendid for window boxes.

Of course, you have to plan your color combinations ahead of time to get the best effects. Such annuals as blue ageratum or purple or amethyst browallia, bright lobelia or phlox or snap dragons -- these will give brilliant color effects. If you want more green and some trailing vines, use wandering jew and vinca. Vines give a soft, graceful appearance and hide the wooden box. English ivy or the daintier members of the ivy family are also nice in box gardens.

But window boxes may be useful as well as decorative. If you have an eye to the practical as well as the artistic, you'll grow some seasoning herbs in your box -- among the other plants, if you like. Think of having fresh seasonings and green garnishes right on your window sill just for the picking! Parsley, for example, makes a very pretty bright green border for your box, yet it is also useful in the kitchen at mealtime. And chives -- those mild cousins of the onion -- chives will grow easily in your box and provide you with some lovely blue flowers, yet they'll also help you flavor soups and salads and stews. Nasturtium plants give a spicy taste to salad, yet grow some of the most bright and cheerful blossoms.

Only a few cents spent on seeds will allow you a generous supply of seasoning herbs. By the way, the garden experts tell me that Champion Dwarf Curled parsley is a variety particularly good for window boxes because it is compact and makes the most of a small space. Perfection parsley is another good variety. Since parsley seed is slow to germinate, you can start it sooner if you soak it for 24 hours in tepid water before planting.

Onion shoots make excellent seasonings for spring and summer salads. And, of course, they're excellent for cream dishes and low-cost meat dishes. The same holds true of the chives we were talking about. Both of these members of the onion family will grow either in flower pots or in window boxes.

Another herb that deserves a place in your box is thyme, that old-fashioned favorite for soup, stew and gravy. Thyme grows nicely in a sunny window. By the way, when you plant thyme seed, don't cover it. Just press it into the surface of the soil.

You can raise mint in your window garden, too -- peppermint or spearmint. Either of these will give you fresh, fragrant sprigs for beverages and fruit desserts. Other herbs to include in your box are basil -- so good in tomato mixtures; watercress; rose geranium and lemon verbena.

A window herb garden needs plenty of cool, fresh air and sunshine -- but not the scorching midday sun. It needs regular daily watering, but not too much moisture at a time. If plant lice appear, use a nicotine spray or dust that you can get at the seed store. But you will find that insects are less likely to bother the fragrant herbs than other plants.

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